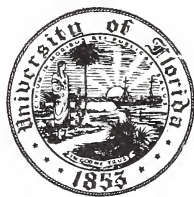




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IN TIME OF SWALLOWS



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IN TIME OF SWALLOWS

52 AMERICAN BIRDS

Poems by MAE WINKLER GOODMAN

Illustrations by

WILLIAM E. SCHEELE

*Director, Cleveland Museum
of Natural History*

NEW YORK

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1951

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FOREWORD

USUALLY introductions are written to point out to readers the merits of the work they are about to read. Often, however, the merits are more obvious in themselves than they appear in discussion. In reading one of these poems you will see a living bird flashing before your eyes among green leaves, hopping delicately on a lawn, or looking out warily from a secret nest—you will hear his call or song and feel you know him intimately. What could I add to this? Only that I am proud to have had something to do with the making of this book. I chose many of these poems for *The Washington Post* while I was its poetry editor; I encouraged Mae Winkler Goodman to expand a group of a few bird portraits to the considerable series you see here; and then suggested she secure an illustrator and make a book of it. I had not dreamed, I admit, that she would find such an illustrator as William Scheele, at once an ornithologist of distinction and an artist—able, without compromise, to combine scientific accuracy with the intangibles of omission and suggestion and atmosphere that make a picture not merely exact, but real and living.

Here, in poetry and illustrations alike, is air, through which wings beat or flutter or glide, and light and colors flash, and calls, whistles and songs pour down to us. Let us go out, to see and hear the birds.

KENTON KILMER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

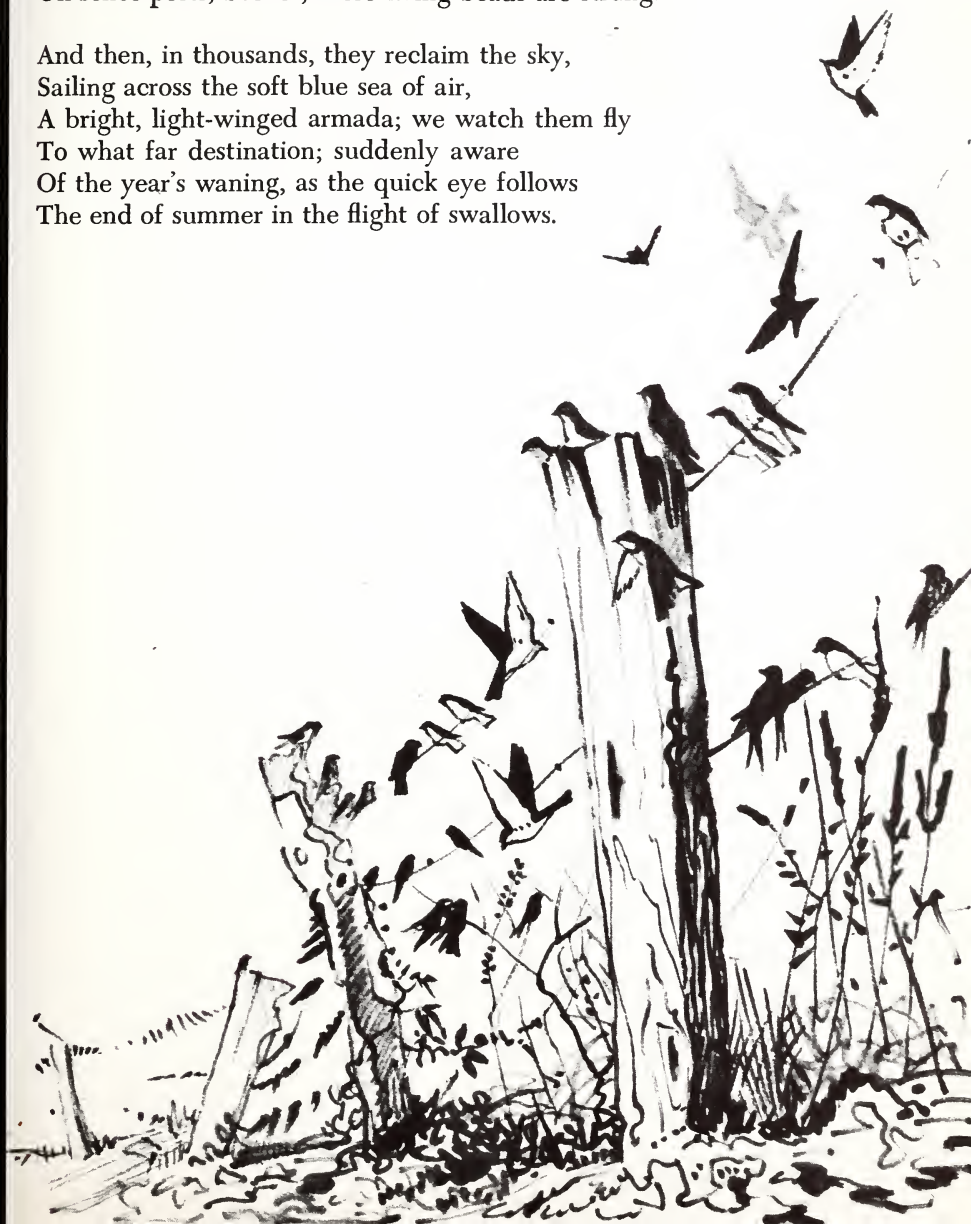
Some of the poems in this book have been published in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *The Scientific Monthly*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, *Living Wilderness*, *Nature Magazine*, *Trails*, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *American Weave*.

IN TIME OF SWALLOWS

IN TIME OF SWALLOWS

The pear is weighted now with more than fruit—
In hordes they come, a wingèd avalanche,
Descending on the tree from tip to root,
Shaking the leaves, bending each silver branch.
They overflow the meadows for miles around
In multitudes, spilling their liquid song;
This is the time of swallows; along the ground,
On fence posts, bushes, these living beads are strung.

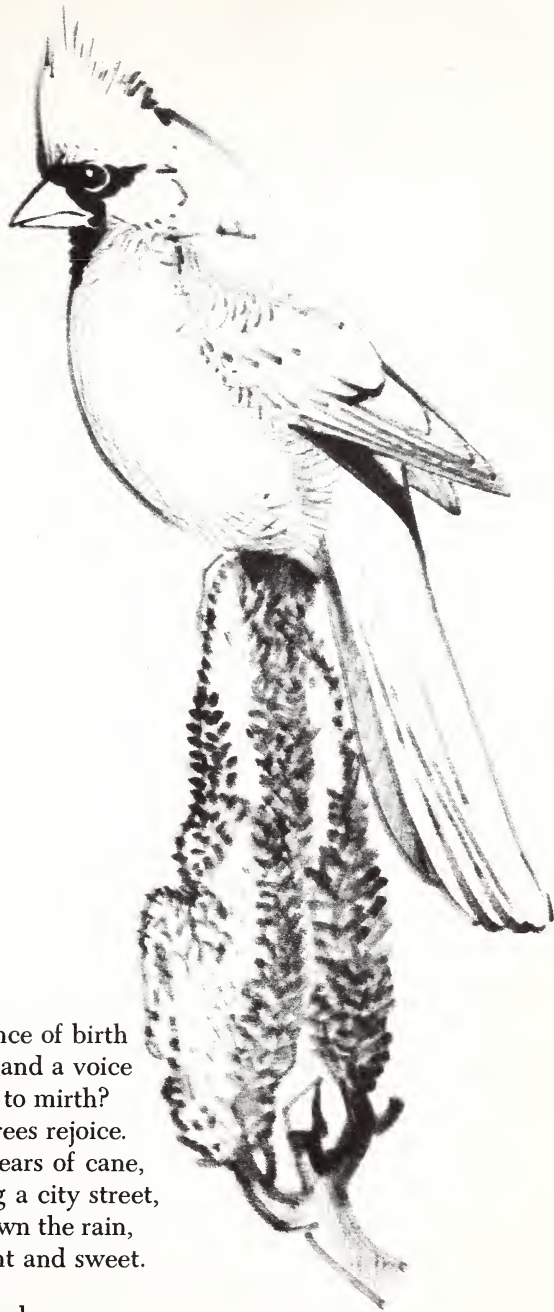
And then, in thousands, they reclaim the sky,
Sailing across the soft blue sea of air,
A bright, light-winged armada; we watch them fly
To what far destination; suddenly aware
Of the year's waning, as the quick eye follows
The end of summer in the flight of swallows.



PAINTED BUNTING

Come out of hiding,
little painted bunting;
do not be shy,
but flaunt your Joseph's coat,
your multi-colored robes of feathered sky.
Why must you lurk among the weedy tangles,
along the banks of streams,
weaving your leafy nest,
or perch upon some tree top or a bush
to spill your clear, sweet chant
above the evening hush?

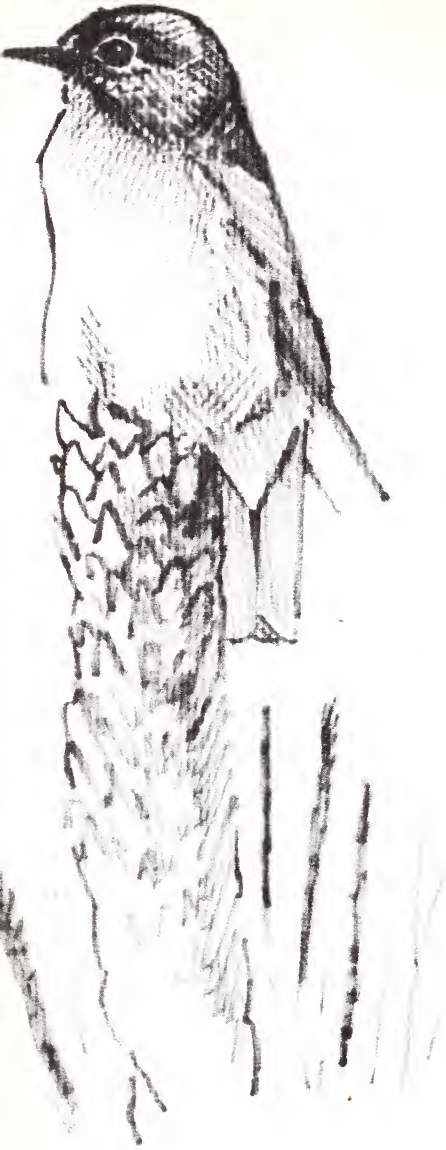




CARDINAL

Oh lovely bird, what happy chance of birth
Gave you both scarlet plumage, and a voice
So sweet it stirs the lonely heart to mirth?
Your presence makes even the trees rejoice.
Weaving among the emerald spears of cane,
Skirting a swampland, detouring a city street,
Whistling across the wind, or down the rain,
Your bell-like song rings resonant and sweet.

And yet your beauty is ephemeral;
Your song is less of earth than out of heaven.
You flash across the vision, beautiful,
And sing until the very soul is riven.
Bird of brilliance, bird of song and flame,
Let light and music syllable your name!



BLUEBIRD

Sitting sedately on a mullein stalk,
or perched upon a newly white-washed fence
surveying with candid-camera eye
the secret tenants of the blowing grass,
are you of earth, or sky
(the wings blue-drenched,
breast tinged an orange rust,
and dipped in dust)?

Yet when you sing
we know from whence you come,
oh sweet, ethereal-voiced!
Gay, modest little bird,
skirting the woodland,
haunting the apple orchard
summer-long,
you are a small blue flame
alive with song!

WOOD THRUSH

Skirting the undergrowth,
tracing the forest floor,
the woodland streams,
your red-brown body flashes
its small, rusty flame
then disappears,
till suddenly,
from a low, leaf-weighted limb
we glimpse your polka-dotted breast,
we trick the liquid notes,
the flute-like song





RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

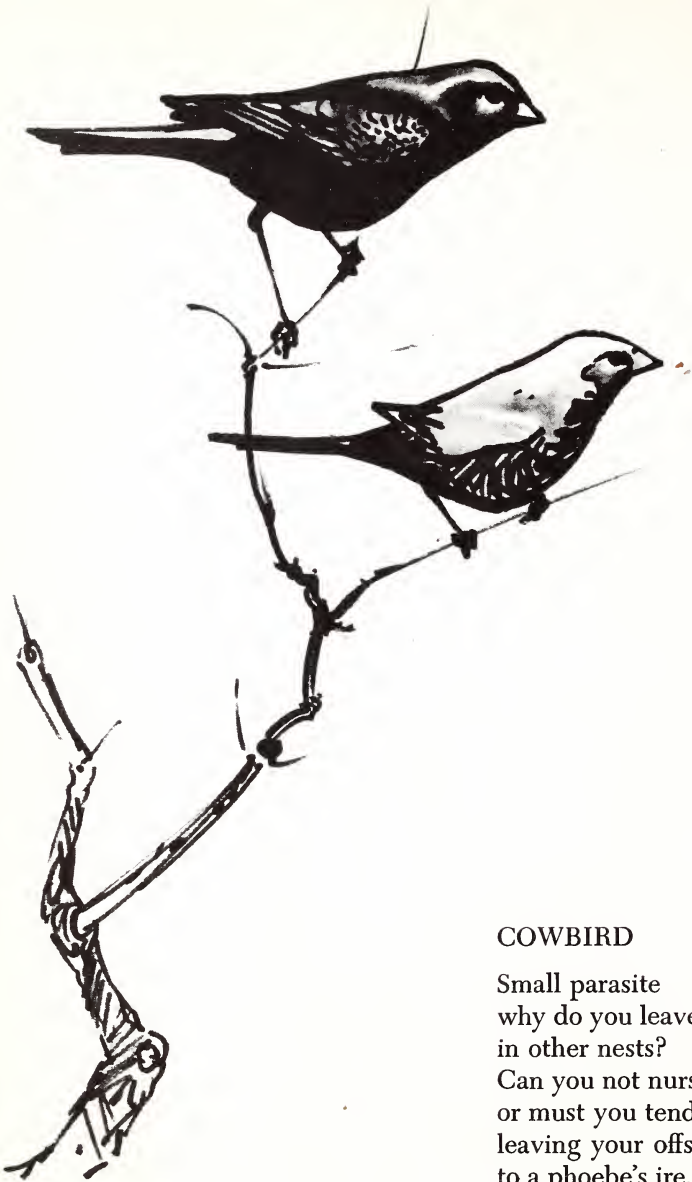
Dipping like sun
in quick and restless motion,
darting above the morning glory urns,
brushing the dew-starred petals
of the nasturtium,
you are a blur of wings,
a flash of light
in swift, perpetual flight.
The iridescent ruby of your throat
burns like an unset gem
above the bleeding heart,
the hollyhocks . . .
Songless,
your wings hum nameless little tunes
among the daisies and the annual phlox.
Oh, tiny hummer,
feeding on the nectar of a flower,
you are but constant to the sun-sweet hour.



CATBIRD

Suddenly
the vine becomes alive
and from the tangled leaves
the mourning feathers,
velvet-dark,
stir softly—
the unexpected song,
the quick derisive note
out of the silken throat . . .
the catbird's call.
Unruffled, prim,
coaxing, scolding, teasing,
the tail tipped forward,
two shining beads for eyes,
he moves along the hedgerows
and the shrubs,
half mimicry, half laughter,
mewing kitten-wise,
the song flowing after.





COWBIRD

Small parasite
why do you leave your eggs
in other nests?
Can you not nurse your own,
or must you tend the cattle in the fields,
leaving your offspring
to a phoebe's ire,
or to a vireo's generous tolerance?
Must you think only of your
own bright needs?
You feed on grasshoppers,
or on the seeds
of grain or foxtail grass,
while in some alien nest
a small brown head
wakes to a foster breast.

YELLOW-SHAFTED FLICKER

Here, in the hollow of a sycamore
The yellow-shafted flicker makes his home;
The emerald leaves provide his only door—
A roof of sky insures an azure dome.
Wild fruit and dogwood are his daily fare,
Or sour-gum, and poison ivy berries;
Half earth, half sky, he navigates the air,
Tasting the sun, or sampling wild, sweet cherries.

Over the summer fields we hear his call
Out of the tiny beak; then *wicker, wicker*,
In loud insistence, till the sharp notes fall
Back in his throat; the yellow-shafted flicker
Flashes across the camera of our sight,
Leaving a streak of song, a golden light.





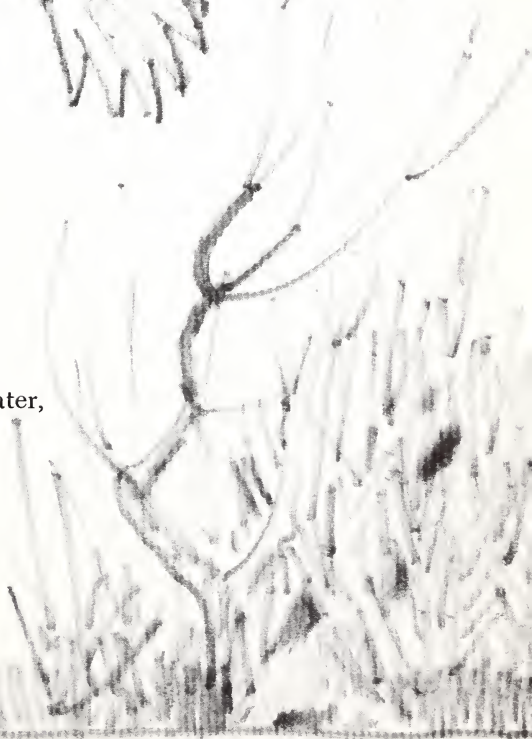
GREAT BLUE HERON

Narcissus-wise,
he bends above the pool,
gazing with golden eyes,
the sky-winged one—
the great blue heron.
Silent he waits
on slender, bamboo legs,
motionless,
the graceful neck arched downward,
great feathers wind-carved—
only the gentle murmur of the stream,
the whisper of a leaf
betray the stillness of this woodland dream;
(lost in the shadows
of the silver water
an unwary perch moves ever nearer
the all-embracing shadow
on the shore . . .)



LOUISIANA HERON

Lady-of-the-waters,
silver gray,
haunting the tidal shallows,
the mud flats and the swamps,
you walk on slender stilts
with awkward grace,
until a fish will set you
running wildly,
stabbing the surface of the quiet water,
snipping with scissored beak
a moving shadow—
only your motion
ruffles the perfect stillness,
while your harsh croak
shatters the pearl-gray silence.





YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO

Here, where the willow thicket
hems the stream,
slipping quietly through the tangled growth,
see where a cuckoo moves with easy grace,
its back an emerald satin in the sun,
its placid face
serene and unperturbed.

Or see,
deliberately how it moves from tree to tree,
the white breast flashing in the morning light,
the long tail
splashed with white.

Then wait, and hear
(music that the caterpillars fear)
the clucking notes running down the scale
in unmelodic strain.

(There are those who say
the cuckoo can foretell the coming rain).

MOURNING DOVE

Where are you going,
dove of the tawny breast,
your wide wings whistling through the quiet air,
your pointed tail splashed white against the sky?
Have you been hunting grasses for your nest,
or gathering weed seeds for your latest brood?
So joyfully you comb the field and wood,
providing for your mate and for your young,
why is your only call a plaintive cry,
a mournful call by which the heart is wrung?

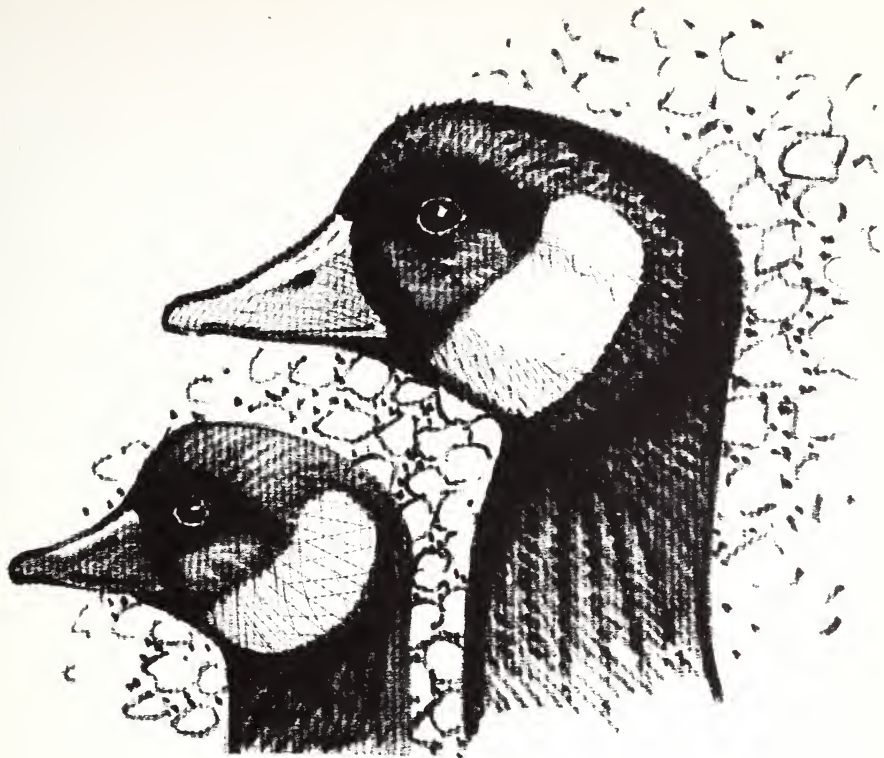


COOTS

There, moving like a solid, slate-blue mass,
the dark necks pumping as they swim along,
gabbling together, their bills a chalky white,
the Coots go by.

Now watch them as they pass,
clumsy birds, trusting and unafraid.
And yet, should they take fright,
with wings and feet they skit across the water,
splashing and fluttering before they fly,
till, like a single bird, they clear the lake,
scattering into the marshy brake,
the shore's safe cover,
only to reappear, the danger over.





CANADA GEESE

Before the other birds they sense the spring
And feel a nameless stirring to set forth,
As if a calendar tugged at their wings
And urged them back into the waiting North.
See where their leader cleaves the snowy air,
The shifting silhouettes scrawled on the sky
In undulating waves; the geese are there
Swelling the heavens with their barking cry.

Then, voices muffled, they come flying low,
To settle clumsily upon the lake,
Invisible against the sifted snow
But for the long black stocking of the neck.
Alert to danger, wary, full of guile,
The geese remain to rest and preen a while.

BROWN CREEPER

Little brown creeper,
is your whole life spent
spiralling up the sycamore's long trunk
only to drop like a falling leaf
back to the base of some tall neighboring tree
and once again begin your strange ascent?
Your body blended close against the bark,
your slim curved bill
misses no insect as you move along.
Friendly little bird, lisping your song,
or gossiping with chickadees and kinglets,
you build your wiry nest
beneath a strip of overhanging bark
or in a hole some flicker may have left.
Little brown creeper,
the forest is your home, the woodland scene,
and for your purposes
the sky is green.



TUFTED TITMOUSE

Pert, curious little bird,
haunting the woodland,
vaulting from branch to branch,
your loud whistle makes the forest ring,
your varied notes spilling their avalanche
throughout the leafless winter,
the trillium spring.

We trace you by your clear, persistent song,
glimpsing the chestnut flanks, the small gray crest,
or watch you pad some hollow for your nest
with feathers, moss and hair,
hardy bird,
staying throughout the year.



TREE SPARROW

Down from the frozen tundra of the North,
leaving their breeding ground, their weedy nest,
the small tree sparrows come in noisy flocks,
wearing a chestnut cap,
a small black emblem on their plain gray breast.
These are the winter chippies, and their song,
like little silver sleighbells in the snow,
pours like the music from a single throat
its sweet and yet metallic little note.

In April we will see them off again
while other sparrows come to take their place—
the Field and Swamp and Chipping will return,
but we will not forget
the dark insignia, the russet coronet.





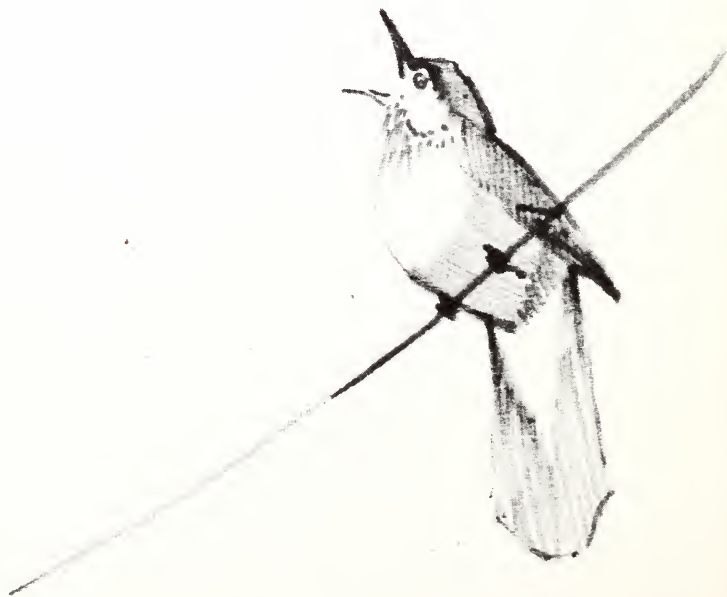
GOLDFINCH

Oh lovely wild canary,
golden-breasted,
the sun has taken wing,
and learned to sing.
Now song and light are one:
goldfinch, and sun.
Daintily you pause a while to feed
upon a thistle's seed,
and then resume your interrupted flight
in rapid arcs
of undulating light—
till from the orchard, beyond the garden wall,
swells the sweet echo of your plaintive call.

MOCKINGBIRD

Oh pale gray prima donna of the skies—
Oh lovely mimic of the grassy field,
Your only need is song; you improvise
Or imitate, with bell-notes, silver-pealed.
How can so small, so soft a feathered throat
Release so vast a hurricane of song?
Your music is a rising flood of notes
The hills and meadows echo, to prolong.

And yet you show no temperament; you sing
From dawn to dusk, throughout the grateful year
(Although you are more sedulous in spring)
Mellifluous songs almost too sweet to bear.
So small a breast, so prodigal a voice,
The very stars must listen, and rejoice!





NUTHATCH

Strange little bird,
have you confused
the forests of the sky
with those of earth
that, topsy-turvy,
you survey the world
head downward, in reverse?
If you are bird at all
why do you fold your wings,
to creep and crawl
over the rugged bark,
from branch to branch,
stopping to 'hatch'
a beech-or-butternut?
Strange little creature,
upside down, absurd,
are you indeed
a tree-mouse
or a bird?

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

What is this hush that falls upon the wood
Where but a moment since it rang with sound?
Now all is still; eyes peer from every bush
While fear runs like a squirrel across the ground.

The silence is alive: they watch him come,
The small blue darter, plunging from the skies,
The blue-gray feathers quivering for attack,
The needled talons, the piercing ruby eyes.

Wait, smaller birds, take refuge where you are:
Do not come forth; suspend the incaught breath;
Here beauty stalks in strange and fearful guise
And plumage wears the sharpened fangs of death.





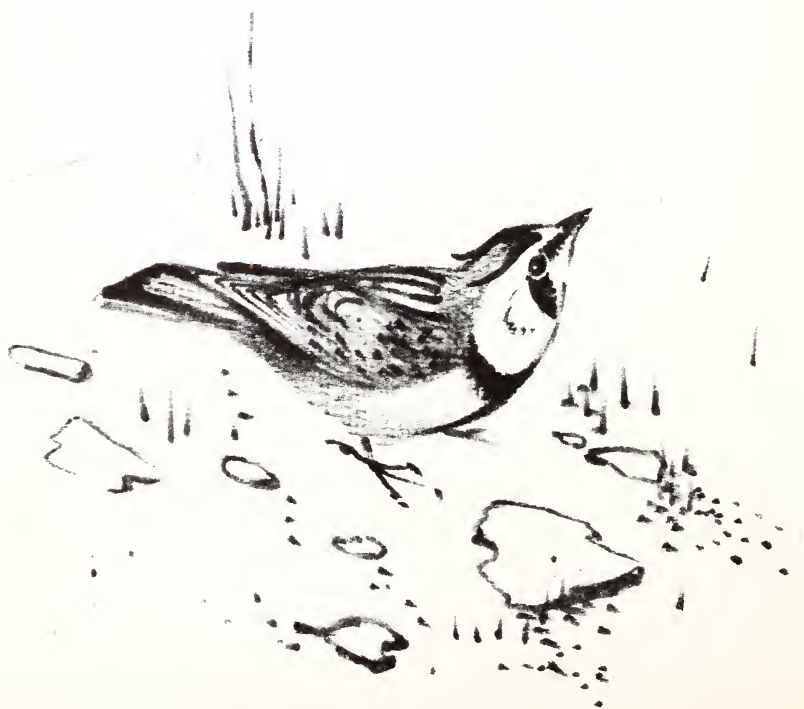
SPARROW HAWK

How different from your brothers,
gentle hawk,
smallest falcon and the loveliest,
you haunt the orchards and the open fields,
bobbing your head,
bobbing your red-brown tail,
choosing some hollow tree
in which to nest.

To us you hardly seem a bird of prey
hovering lightly on the summer air,
but mice and insects and the smaller birds
are not deceived . . . and they had well beware.

HORNED LARKS

Once again the larks are on the move,
building their nests, undaunted by the snow.
We watch them as they go
running like tiny mice across the fields,
or rising all together,
a sudden cloud of sky and shining feather
pouring their crystal notes into the air,
then, whirling earthward, to the snowless, bare
patches of field, they bank their wings and land.
Now that the larks are with us once again
with lilt of song and wing,
we can begin to think of other birds—
we can begin to think of spring.



SLATE-COLORED JUNCOS

Now they are back again;
the other birds have flown, seeking a sunnier clime,
but the Black Snowbirds have come,
down from their northern homes of spruce and fir.
Gone are the catbird and the tanager
but now abound
along the hedgerows, over the frozen ground
(or gathered in sudden flight,
the white tail feathers flashing in the light)
the small, gray-vested juncos. In chattering bands
they tip the feeder, going back and forth,
or roam the countryside, in search of seeds,
gay, friendly birds
talking among themselves, trilling their song—
we shall miss the robins less,
having the juncos with us
winter-long.



ROCK WREN

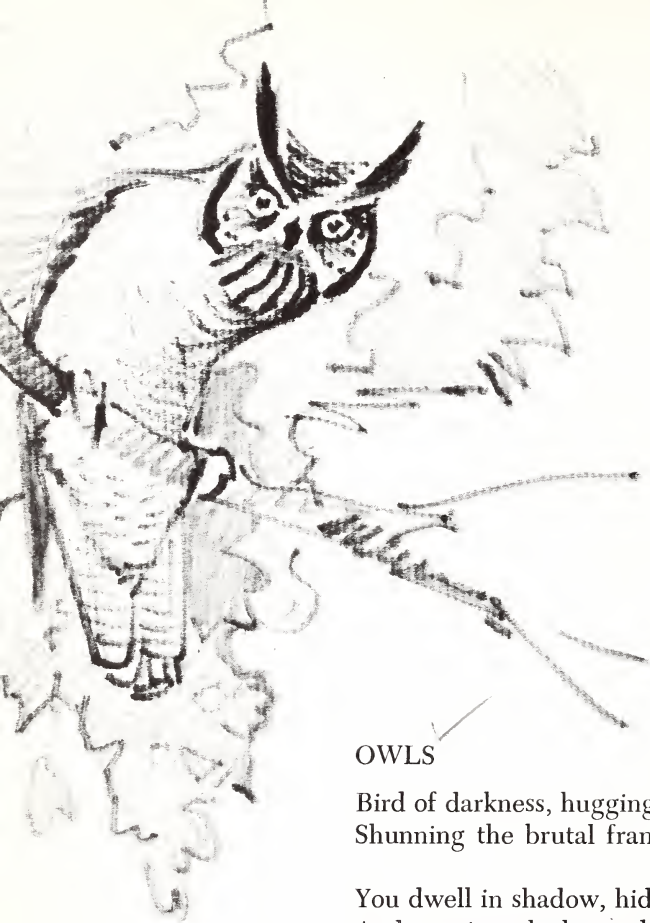
Pale
mountain-dweller,
hugging the white-sloped cliffs,
avoiding the cool green
valleys of the canyon,
you build your very nest
among the rocks,
creviced between a ledge or gully bank,
paving it with bits of shell and stone—
then, taking the wind alone
you spread your soft brown wings
in sudden flight,
small and incongruous
against the grassless height!



KILDEER

Running over the new ploughed field,
the empty pasture,
your legs twinkling
as they catch the light,
or spreading your long, graceful wings
in sudden flight,
must you forever argue with the wind,
or tattle to the grass, the sun-warmed clover?
Noisy, chattering plover,
do you not ever tire
of your own song,
threading the meadows,
skipping the fields along?





OWLS

Bird of darkness, hugging the friendly night,
Shunning the brutal frankness of the light,

You dwell in shadow, hidden against the bark
And peer into the heavy-lidded dark,

While we, with sightless, sun-accustomed eyes,
Go blindly by, you see the star-spun skies

And from the lonely station that you keep
Behold a world locked in the trance of sleep.

Strange bird of night, how quietly you prowl
(Great-horned, snowy, barn, or gray screech owl)

Your great head poised, your eyes like empty seas,
Moving on noiseless wings among the trees

To stalk relentlessly your furtive prey
Before the blinding onslaught of the day.

Oh winged philosopher, guard well your post
Lest someone take you for a feathered ghost.

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO

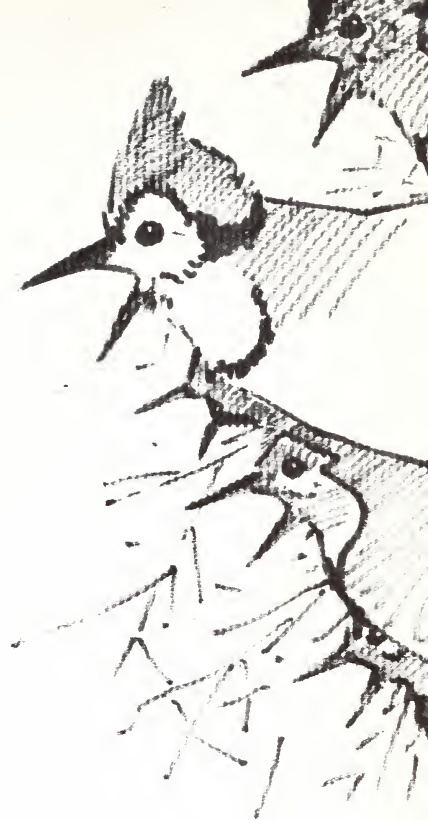
Bespectacled,
wearing a golden vest,
a soft gray coat,
small yellow-throat,
hidden deep among
an emerald crown of leaves,
we know you by your
sweet but husky song.
Forked in a twig
you build your lovely nest,
embroidered with lichens,
pearled with spider silk . . .
while deep within its
warm and shimmering cup
four small pink eggs withhold
the unborn song,
the tight-shelled gold.





PHOEBE

Phoebe,
Phoebe,
bird with the lovely name,
calling yourself,
calling over and over,
how glad we are to see you coming early,
knowing you will be
one of the last to leave.
Phoebe, Phoebe,
waving your restless tail,
searching for insects near the house and barn,
you build your mossy nest
beneath the eaves
and leave within it
five pure-lustred pearls.
Repeat your name once more
tame little bird:
Phoebe, Phoebe,
till even the grass has heard.



BLUE JAY

A segment of the sky has taken wing;
A small blue mote of heaven split away,
Assumed a raucous voice and tried to sing;
Formed beak and feathers, and became a jay.
See: weaving in among the oak and beech,
Lighting the woodland with its azure flame;
Hear: a whistle, like a trumpet, or a screech,
Loud and querulous, neither wild nor tame.

Noisy, gregarious bird, does it not matter
That you are often called disreputable?
With unconcern you steal, or fuss and chatter,
Your one defense that you are beautiful.
Would that instead your coat of sky-tipped feather
And a sweet disposition went together!



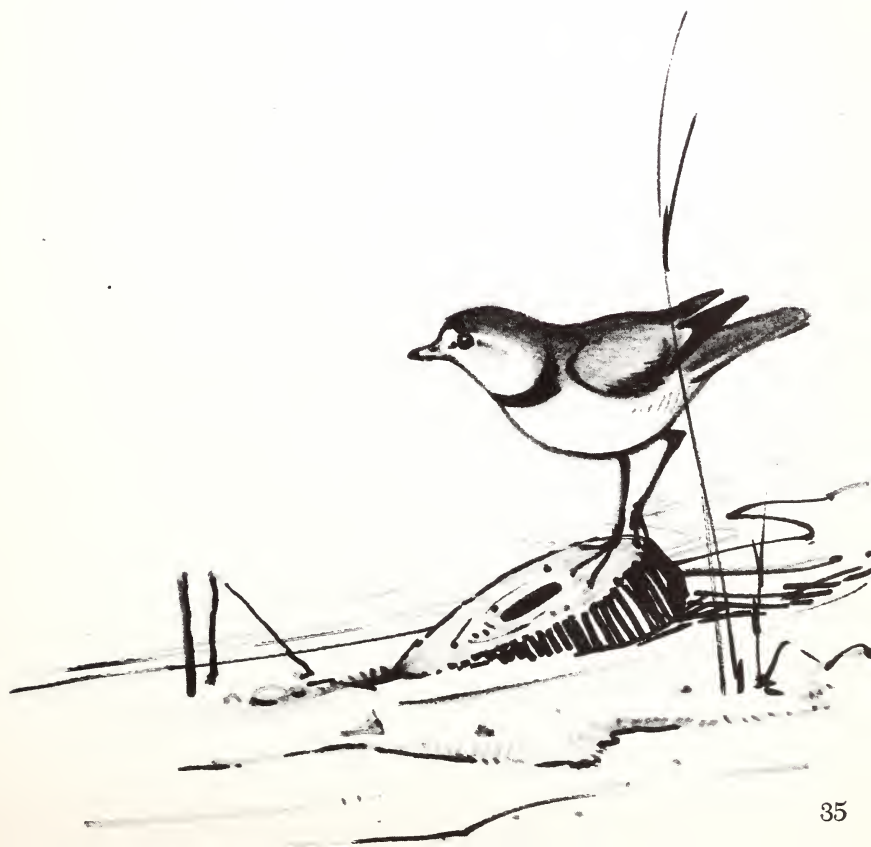
RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS

Threading the marshes,
circling the swamplands,
the hayfields and the orchards,
the sudden brilliance of your rubied wings
flashes across the morning,
summer-wise.

You weave your nests
of flattened leaves and grasses
in tangled cattail clumps
above the curling water,
and then commute in hordes
back to the fields,
a red-streaked, onyx cloud
moving between the corn stalks
and the skies.

PIPING PLOVER

Pale, ashen-white,
blended against
the lonely waste of beach,
invisible upon the pallid sand,
so still, so near
that should I stretch my hand
I'd all but reach
your soft, blond wings,
the sable-banded throat,
do you await some message from the sea
while you seek cover
on the quiet shore?
Surely elsewhere
(far beyond the lapping water)
waits another small, pale plover
to whom you pipe
your plaintive, mournful song
the evening long.



MEADOWLARK

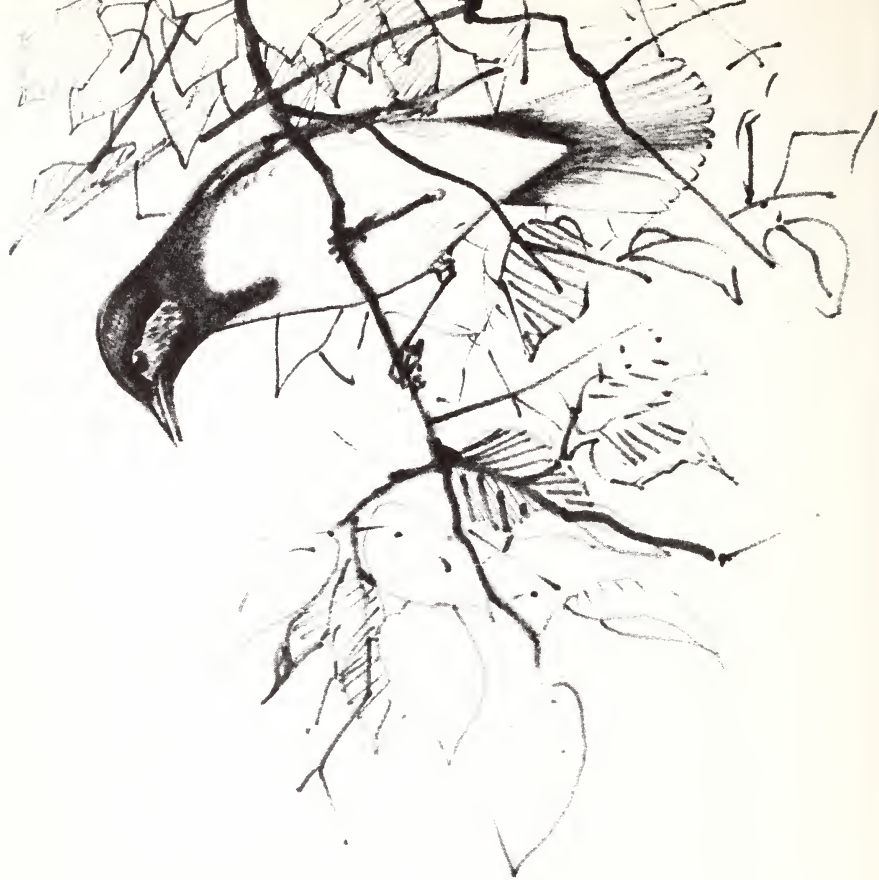
From what tall vantage,
poised between the prairie of the sky
and grassy plains of earth
are you now perched,
to gossip with the wind,
or serenade the clouds
with clear, melodious song?
Yet not for long
will wings lie still
(folded fanwise); the white
tail feathers soon
will lift again in flight,
like outspread sails
on the soft ocean
of the air . . . or in quick, fluttering motion
splash through the summer noon,
till once again you anchor to some tree,
to spill the pent-up, crystal melody.





VEERY

Pale,
tawny-breasted,
out of the speckled throat
you answer to the imitated note
of your own call.
Yet do not be deceived,
but seek your mate
in the willow and the alder swamps
where the sweet, wild sound
quivers and runs
among the thickets
over the shallow ground,
till, out of the forest hush
there sings another
small, pale veery thrush.



BALTIMORE ORIOLE

Small
fire-bird,
how well you earn your name,
wings of burning jet,
and breast of flame!
Your bright red-orange plumage
is a sun
setting against the top branch
of the elm.
You pause beside
your low-hung dangling nest
(woven of weed stalk,
threaded with bark and twine)
then seek once more
the green sky of the tree
to improvise
your clear, sweet melody.

OVENBIRD

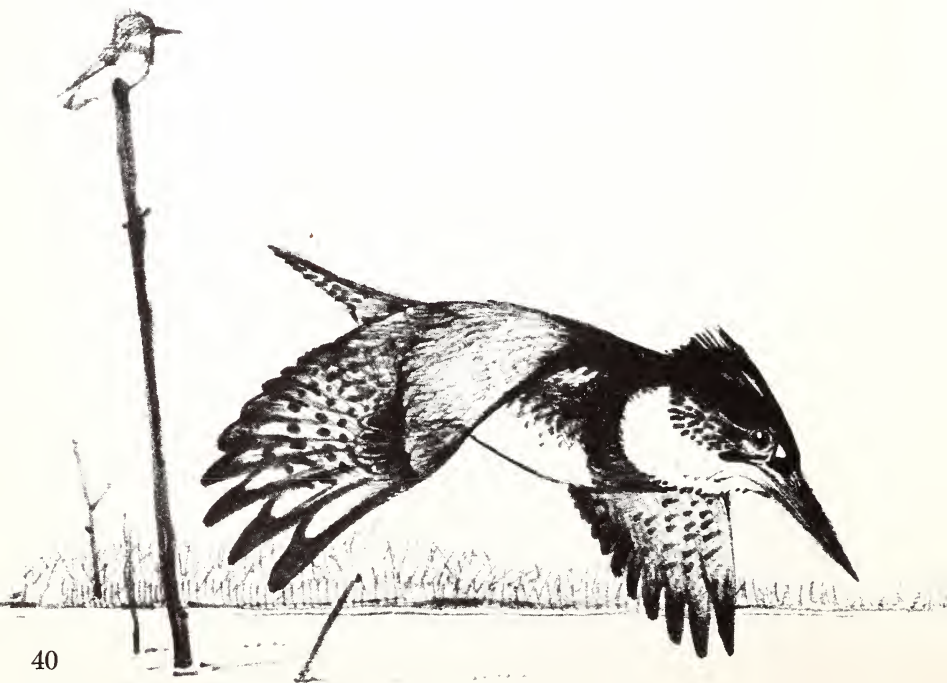
Tracing
the grassy carpet of the wood,
circling the undergrowth
in search of food,
or seeking the maple's lowest bough
from which to sing,
while the sweet notes
resound and ring,
weaving through the shadowy lace of leaves
to the open clearing of the sky,
we know the little woodland warbler
is close by.

Yet on a moon-soft night
he who has heard
the lovely flight song
of the ovenbird
little guesses the small speckled throat
whence pours this silver avalanche,
drowning the night out,
note by quivering note.



KINGFISHER

Wheeling through the vast blue ocean
of the air
in rapid flight
(wings rinsed with light)
or gliding smoothly
almost too still for motion
low, low
above the winding bayou,
the narrowing river,
feathers taut, aquiver,
agate eyes aglow,
how jealously you guard
your broad domain,
solitary, lone,
claiming the whole bright sea coast
for your own.

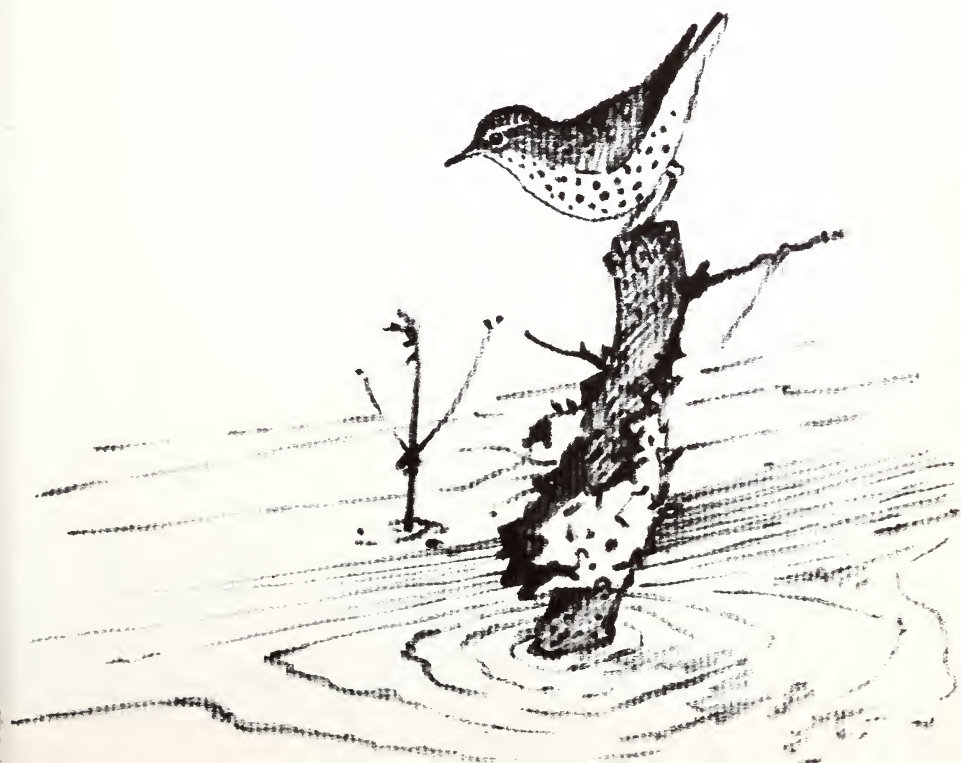


SPOTTED SANDPIPER

Look closely: there, along the rocky shore,
a small bird teeters on its slender legs,
the nervous body tilting up and down,
the white breast spotted brown.

This is our little Tip-up, haunting the ocean's edge,
the swampy mudflats, or the river's fringe,
until he senses danger. Then see him rise,
piping his sharp, excited little cries,
and, skimming the water with his downcurved wings,
come in to shore a little farther on.

Cheery little bird,
how barren looms the beach when you are gone.



WINTER WREN

Now come into your own,
gay little wren,
come in the open,
out from the cool, moist swamps,
the sun-sealed wood.
Cock your short tail
over your tiny back
and bare your dark-barred belly to the wind.
So secretly you move among the brush
we hardly guess your presence till your voice
pours in a mad extravagance of sound
so sweet and clear
the very wood is drowned.
Come out of hiding, little winter wren—
sing loud and long,
for more than ever now
we need your song.



HERMIT THRUSH

Within the green cathedral
of the wood,
or from the open altar of the hill
your song soars skyward,
bell-cadenced, sweet,
almost ethereal.
Loving the pines and hemlocks,
you do not scorn
the tangled swamplands
or the grassy plains—
if you can sing,
what matter where you are?
Your song cascades in golden avalanche,
leaping from branch to branch,
from star to star!





PURPLE GRACKLES

Now they have taken over once again:
The city is invaded, and the park
Is studded with their iridescent sheen,
The purple plumage shimmering and dark,
Or blue, blue green, and black (the young are brown)
Searching for insects over the sodden ground;
See where they punctuate a script of lawn,
Then listen for their harsh, metallic sound.

Now watch them take the sky in steady flight,
Keeling their wedge-shaped tail into the wind,
These birds whose feathers have been dipped in light,
Whose yellow eyes appraise the waiting land.
Or come, but softly, to the deep-cupped nest
Where five small bluish eggs warm to a breast.

MARSH WREN

Small, homely bird,
dwelling among the tall rank reeds,
the cattails and the flags,
lost against the sedge
and the spongy mallows,
still must your song
rise over the steamy marshes
before the dawn,
and far into the night.
Oh simple little bird,
unnoticed,
scorning the open meadows of the sky,
you hug the damp, dark earth,
the mossy fen,
undaunted,
pouring forth your merry little song
day through, night long.



WOOD WARBLERS

Bright, gay-breasted birds,
flitting among the twigs, touching the leaves
so lightly that the air is scarcely stirred,
you fill the wood with your insistent notes.
Blue-winged and golden-winged,
or orange-crowned,
cerulean, yellow-throats,
or black and white,
you dart like butterflies among the trees
making the woodland live
with song, with light!





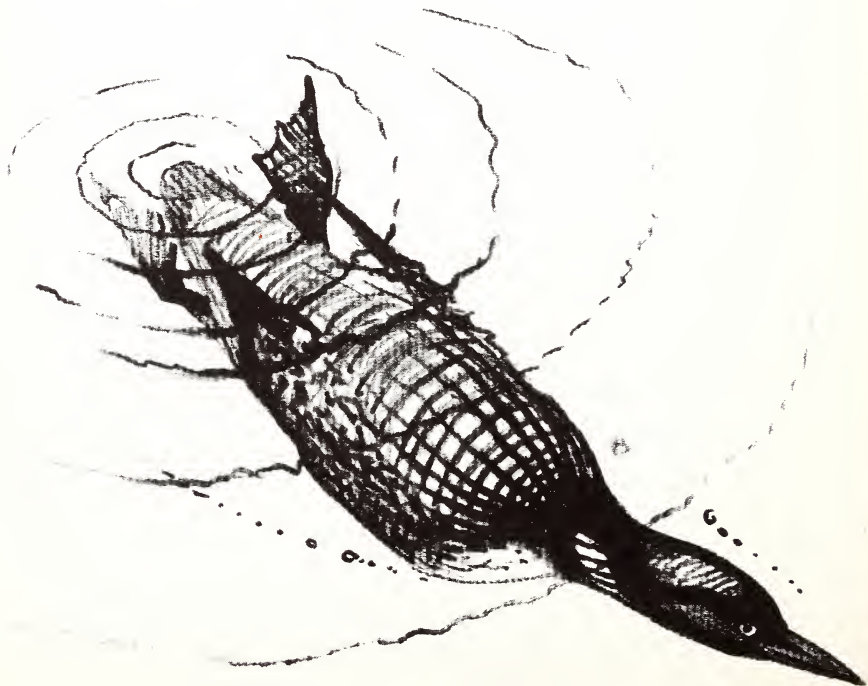
WAXWINGS IN THE APPLE TREE

See
how the branches sway,
and how the apple tree
now comes alive—
too early yet for leaves,
it knows a richer foliage:
the waxwings'
cool, sleek feathers
strung along the boughs,
sun-bathed, wind-ruffled.
Now they are everywhere,
tangled among the narrow-arching twigs,
pecking the green,
the bitter dangling fruit:
the unripe promise.
The tree is theirs—
the tree, the sky, the spring,
tricked in the soft, pale
flutter of a wing!

THE LOONS

Now with the rising storm the loons rejoice,
Their voices echoing above the gale,
Loon answering loon. They ride the wintry seas,
Their crazy laughter mounting to a wail.
Their loud storm-call is heard across the bay,
A mournful song above the rising wind,
Blowing an Easterly, the seamen say,
Hearing the eerie calls across the sound.

But wait till mating season: then they come
Back to some quiet, forest-circled lake
Or solitary isle to make their home,
To court and preen, their feathers velvet dark.
Here is a summer idyll, all they can wish:
The water, sun, a mate . . . abundant fish.





PILEATED WOODPECKER

Of all the stirring sights and sounds of spring
What other has such power to enthrall
As to surprise the fleeing, white-splashed wing,
The long, inimitable drumming call
Above the tree tops? Hush. Do not draw near;
This bird is shy and secretive at best;
The Pileated woodpecker is here,
With white-striped neck, the blazing bright red crest.

So striking, yet contriving to remain
Unnoticed as the least bird in the wood,
Swift and elusive as a streak of light,
Still he returns, year after year, again
Back to his nesting place to raise his brood,
So shy, so wild, we never know him, quite . . .



SCARLET TANAGER

Less like a flame than like a fallen sun
You rest, immobile, on the maple bough,
Serene and calm. Oh, gleaming-vested one,
Are you aware that waiting just below,
Eyes stare in secret wonder? Have you heard
The incaught breath, lest you should take alarm?
Or are you neither sun nor flame nor bird,
But captured light tricked in a feathered form?

The air is parted, the leaves begin to stir,
And you are lost, until once more the eye
Recovers you, oh lovely tanager,
Against the emerald forest of the sky.
Small, scarlet-breasted, with your onyx wings,
At last the sun has learned to fly, and sings!

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER

Here, on the spongy margin
of a swamp
the blue-winged warbler
weaves his nest of grass
and crisp dead leaves—
Yet must he seek the sycamore's top branch
to spill his song across the weedy ground.
(See how the leaves are quivering
where a small blue splint of sky
shakes them with sound).



MAGNOLIA WARBLER

Small, gay warbler,
who designed your dress,
the yellow plumage
shot with black and white,
your onyx-banded tail,
the jet-striped vest?

Threading the woodland
with your golden light,
you gather twigs and grasses for your nest,
till from the low branch
of a hemlock tree
you pause to spill
your brief, sweet melody.





WHIPPOORWILL

Strange bird of night,
mottled against the shadows,
whistle your song
across the windless meadows,
the quiet fields.
Drop your lonely notes
(three small round pebbles)
over the leafy wood,
the purpling dusk.
(Wait, hear,
the silver trilogy,
now near, now far . . .
there, rising beyond the hill,
answering the first white star!)



ARCTIC TERN

Bird of snow,
white, white, whiter than anything
flake on feathered flake,
wing spread to wing,
over what leagueless ocean
have you come,
past what green isles,
to rest at last
unwearied, graceful still,
upon a floating
skyscraper of ice,
or to a lonely sandbank
where the sun
leans shadowless?
Now, the long flight over,
flight of wind,
flight of drifting snow,
find once again your nest,
your mate,
and in the hangar of the Arctic night
rehearse your Odyssey of flight.



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